

# **MY MEETING WITH HEINRICH HIMMLER**

**APRIL 20/21, 1945**

**Report to the Swedish Section of the World Jewish**

**Congress, Stockholm, Sweden.**

*By Mr. Norbert Masur*

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**REPORT TO THE WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS  
BY MR. NORBERT MASUR**

**REGARDING HIS VISIT WITH HEINRICH HIMMLER  
APRIL 20, 1945.**

During the last year of the war, Jewish organizations within the neutral countries of Europe tried their utmost to bring help to their brethren in the German concentration camps. In Sweden, the Swedish section of the World Jewish Congress was one of the active participants in this aim. Many endeavors were in vain, but some led to positive results. During the course of negotiations one of the members of our section, Mr. H. Storch, started to negotiate with Dr. Felix Kersten who through his medical treatments was in touch with Himmler. We had been told that Kersten, at the behest of the Swedish Foreign Ministry, was partly responsible for the freeing of a large number of prisoners from both German prisons and German concentration camps. At the request of Mr. Storch, Dr. Kersten volunteered to try to negotiate with Mr. Himmler to better the situation of the Jews in the concentration camps.

In the beginning of March 1945, Kersten visited with Himmler and told him of our desires. Several important things resulted from this. It is quite possible, that through these negotiations several concentration camps were surrendered to the Allies without a fight. To achieve further concessions, Kersten proposed that Himmler should negotiate directly with a representative of the World Jewish Congress. Himmler agreed to this and promised safe conduct for the person who would, in the company of Kersten, come for the sessions.

We discussed the plan in our section of the WJC. Because of the unusual and precarious aspects of a meeting with Himmler, the section did not want to make a decision, especially as it was impossible to contact New York in this regard. It was therefore decided to leave it up to a volunteer for this mission whether or not to go ahead. We discussed the matter with the Swedish Foreign Ministry, which was of the definite opinion that direct contact with Himmler would be valuable and would lead to worthwhile results very much in line with the desires of Sweden for a rescue operation. The three local embassies of the Allies, who were informed by us, did not have any objections, in fact, the delegate of the War Refugee Board located in Stockholm encouraged us in this. Therefore we asked Dr. Kersten to let Himmler know that a member of our section, as a private citizen, would come on this mission. Himmler was agreeable with this. Several of our members volunteered for the trip, and it was myself who finally was chosen to make the trip.



Several weeks passed without a date being set for the meeting. The war situation in Germany got more critical every day, and we assumed that it would not be possible to go ahead with the plan. However, suddenly, on the morning of Thursday, April 19, I was notified that Himmler was awaiting us on Thursday or Friday, and we were asked to take the noon airplane from Stockholm to Berlin. I had some doubts as to the value of the trip at this late date, however, an inquiry with the Foreign Ministry resulted in a positive opinion, in that they still held the trip to be worthwhile. The Foreign Ministry prepared several lists of names of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners, whose freedom we were to try to achieve. After receiving this information, Kersten and I decided to leave immediately on the trip.

At 2 pm on April 19 the airplane, marked with the swastika, left Stockholm for Berlin. Kersten and I were the only passengers, otherwise the plane was loaded fully with Red Cross packages. Now I had time to think about the mission. For me as a Jew, it was a deeply moving thought, that, in a few hours, I would be face to face with the man who was primarily responsible for the destruction of several million Jewish people. But my agitation was dampened by the thought that I finally would have the important opportunity to be of help to many of my tormented fellow Jews. I had been in the midst of other help missions before, but always from the safety of Stockholm. This time it was action at the front lines.

The trip to Berlin was without incidents. The North-German plain was peacefully in front of our eyes. The fields seem to be tended carefully. Only once did I discern a bomb crater, the first sign of war, otherwise there were no traces. No soldiers or motorized columns were visible, only an occasional farmer. However, when we approached Berlin, the signs of war became more evident, bombed out houses, factories without roofs. And still, from my bird's eye perspective, it appeared that Berlin was not quite as destroyed as I had expected, and as I later on saw during my drive through the city.

At the Tempelhof airport, my companion showed his passport, however I kept mine in my pocket. I did not have a visa, because only Himmler and his closest associates knew about our visit, it was held in complete secrecy from all the other Nazi bosses. Because of this, I could not apply for a visa at the German embassy in Stockholm. The Gestapo simply ordered that a man in the company of Dr. Kersten should be admitted without passport control.

At the airport, the limousine of the Swedish embassy was awaiting us to take us into the city. However, we could not use this car, and had to wait for a Gestapo car, as we were to proceed to an estate approximately 70 km north of Berlin. Unfortunately, we had to wait almost 2 hours. In the meantime, I had the opportunity to get a first impression of the atmosphere in Berlin. I had a conversation with some of the workers at the airport, and was able to discern that they were war-weary and without hope. Every night air raids lasting 5 to 7 hours, therefore they had to spend that long a time in uncomfortable



air raid shelters without sleep, that is too much even for the strongest person. The air raids occur with the punctuality of a time table. Every evening, shortly after dark, the Russians began the attacks, followed by the Americans, and the British would finish the raids.

Because of this, it was important for us to get out of town before the beginning of the air raids. Around 10 pm, the car arrived, and the excuse was that the telephone connection with Stockholm was interrupted, and they did not know for sure if we were coming. The car left immediately, it was dark, and the moon was shining. The ruins of the houses were like ghosts. The driver sped through the city, which looked as if it was dead. Just now and then a lonely pedestrian who immediately tried to hitch a ride with the car, as public transportation was minimal. We passed piles of destroyed houses, and drove through the narrow openings of tank traps. Several times we had to take a detour to avoid streets that had recently been closed because of bombings.

Finally, after half an hour, we were out of Berlin on the highway. It only took a few minutes before a military patrol stopped us and asked the driver to turn off the headlights, as there was an air alert. The nightly show over Berlin had started. We now had the choice to go into the woods, and wait, or to continue without lights in the dark. We decided to continue.

The anti-aircraft searchlights began to play in the sky, and we stopped and got out of the car to watch the sinister, but fascinating show. From all sides we heard the whirring of propellers, which our driver, with his trained ears, identified as Russian. We saw how illumination flares spread out like a carpet, slowly descending to the ground, lighting up the entire area, how planes would be trapped in the spotlights, but we did not hear any flak. At my question as to why there was no shooting, I got the significant answer that all the flak ammunition had been sent to the front.

We continued, past suddenly appearing military vehicles, past mounds of destruction in the town of Oranienburg, which had suffered an air raid recently. For me, the name Oranienburg was ominous, as here many of my closest relatives became acquainted with the terror of concentration camps, before I was able to rescue them to emigrate into Sweden.

Finally, close to midnight, we arrived at our destination, an estate belonging to Kersten. Here we were supposed to await the visit by Himmler. That night I was not able to sleep. Not because of the constant noise from the planes, but the tension at the thought of meeting with Himmler, the feeling, that possibly the destiny of thousands of Jews were dependent on my words. Even though I knew that Himmler's reason for negotiating was the catastrophic war situation in Germany, still many important results could come out of these negotiations. I was especially concerned about the prisoners in the Rawensbruck camp, which was only 30 km from the estate.



Friday morning one of Himmler's closest associates, Brigade Commander Schellenberg, arrived at the estate to greet us. It was April 20, the birthday of the Fuhrer, and Schellenberg told us that Himmler was to participate at the birthday dinner that night and then would get to the estate as quickly as possible. Hitler should only have known that Himmler, after the birthday party, would be negotiating with a Jew!!

Schellenberg made some very ironic remarks about the birthday party. I had the feeling that it was a birthday dinner, but that, as often occurred in history, some of the participants, who fell into misfortune, would come into conflict with each other with dire results. In addition to the Nazi top honchos, several other well-wishers were on the way to Hitler. The air space above us was full of allied bombers all day long, which were traveling in formation like migratory birds, to reach their destinations. The house, in which we were staying, suddenly began to shake from the explosions of bombs, which were destined for the railroad tracks 2 km away.

During the morning, I had extensive conversations with Schellenberg. I was surprised to see a good-looking young man with soft features, in civilian clothing, not the hard Nazi type which I had expected. He was terribly depressed, considered the war as lost, and was very pessimistic about Germany's future. The main cause of the defeat in his opinion was the systematic air warfare, which destroyed the material and psychological will to resist of the German people. He seemed to have complete understanding for my attempts to rescue the Jews, and promised energetic support of my wishes with Himmler. However, he mentioned that the circle around Hitler even now are strongly opposed to any betterment of the lot of the Jews. In the fall of last year when Himmler allowed 2700 Jews to flee to Switzerland, upon hearing this, Hitler became a raving maniac, and prevented any further planned freeing of Jews. I had the impression that Schellenberg was sincere in his talk with me. It was especially meaningful for me to find out that the military situation in Germany was much worse than had been assumed by us in Stockholm based on the news reports, and the total collapse was only a question of a few weeks, or even days. The reasoning for our petition to Himmler to rescue people would have to be based on this realization.

I spent the afternoon inspecting the estate and talking with the workers there. It was an odd assemblage of people. All of the field and office workers were former prisoners from concentration camps who had been in the camps between 5 and 8 years. They belonged to a sect which refused military service on religious grounds. Also they would not say "Heil Hitler", as "heil", (salvation) can only come from God. Because of this, all of the followers of this sect were put into concentration camps during the first years of the Nazi regime and had to stay there until Kersten was able to get some of them released in 1941/42. Several of the people, who had been in Buchenwald for a number of years, talked about the severe abuse they were exposed to, and which did not abate until 1938, when Jewish prisoners were brought to the camp and the guards were able



to pursue their sadism towards **them**. In addition, there were a number of refugees from eastern and central Germany on the estate, relatives of the owners, all of them traveling for weeks and fleeing the front lines.

During the course of the evening, we received a telephone call to tell us that Himmler would not come until around 2:30 am. We were sitting in the living room by candlelight, as the electricity, as always during air raids, was turned off. I was greatly worked up. Would this man, who was the real ruler of Germany, whose days however were numbered, appear as a man at the top of his power or would he already reflect the shadow of defeat?? I was excited at the thought that in a few minutes I would be face to face with one of the greatest murderers of the Jewish people.

At exactly 2:30 we heard the noise of a car arriving. Kersten went outside, and after a few minutes, Heinrich Himmler entered, followed by Brigade Commander Schellenberg, adjutant Dr. Brandt, and Kersten. In spite of my inner excitement, I appeared outwardly perfectly cool. Himmler greeted me with "Guten Tag", instead of "Heil Hitler", and conveyed his satisfaction at the fact that I came to see him.

We sat at a table, which was set up for coffee for five persons. Himmler was dressed impeccably in his uniform with the insignias of rank and shiny decorations. He looked well groomed, seemed fresh and lively in spite of the late hour, outwardly quiet, and in control. He looked better in person than in photographs. Perhaps his errand and piercing gaze was an expression of sadism and harshness, however, had I not known his past, I would never have believed that this man was singularly responsible for the most extensive mass murders in history.

He began to talk immediately and gave a historical overview of the position of the Nazis vs. the Jews. "In our generation we have not known any peace", he said. "When the first World War began, I was 14 years old. The war hardly ended when the civil war began, and the Jews were deeply involved in the Spartacus revolt. The Jews were a foreign element in our midst, which always evoked irritation. They were driven out of Germany several times, however they always returned. After coming into power, we wanted to settle this issue once and for all, and I was in favor of a humane solution through emigration. I conferred with American organizations, to arrange for a quick emigration, but even countries who claimed to be friendly toward the Jews did not want to admit Jews".

I countered that possibly it might have been more comfortable for the German people not to have a minority among its midst. However, based on prevailing law, it did not seem right to suddenly exile people whose ancestors had lived in a country for a long time. In spite of this, it was necessary for the Jews to bend to the will of force and they tried to emigrate. The National-Socialists wanted a situation, which was created over several centuries, to be changed within a few years, and that was impossible.



Himmler continued: "Then the war brought us into contact with the Jewish masses of the East, who were mostly part of the proletariat. Because of this, many new problems arose. We could not tolerate such an enemy at our backs. The Jewish masses were infected with many diseases, especially typhoid fever. I lost thousands of my S.S. troops through these diseases. Also the Jews were helping the partisans."

Answering my question as to how the Jews could be helping the partisans, after the Germans concentrated them into large ghettos, he said: "They sent news to the partisans. In addition, they were shooting at our troops in the ghettos." **That** was Himmler's reaction to the heroic fight of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto!! What an unbelievable distortion of the truth!

I tried very carefully to get him away from the unfortunate thought to defend his policies against the Jews in front of a Jew, because such an attempt would force him to add lie upon lie to his argument. But it was impossible to do so. It seemed that he had the need to express his defense to a Jew, as he probably felt that the days of his life, or at least the days of his freedom were numbered. And Himmler continued: "In order to stop the epidemics we were forced to cremate the bodies of the many people that died of the diseases. That was the reason we had to build the crematoria, and now, because of this, everybody wants to tighten the noose around our neck." This was the most convulsing try by Himmler to cover up his deeds. I loathed this explanation of the crematoria to such an extent that I could only remain silent.

"The war in the East was unbelievably difficult", said Himmler. "We did not want any war with Russia. But suddenly we learned that the Russians had 20,000 tanks, and that forced us into action. Either we prevailed, or we would perish. The war at the eastern front made the most difficult demands on our soldiers. A terrible climate, never ending distances, an enemy population, and constantly appearing partisans. Only by being harsh could the troops prevail. Because of this they were forced to destroy whole villages, if there was resistance and shooting from such a village. The Russians are not ordinary enemies, we cannot understand their mentality. In the most hopeless situations, they would refuse to capitulate. If, because of these difficulties in the east, the Jewish people suffered great casualties, one needs to remember, that the German people also suffered severely".

Himmler then got to the subject of the concentration camps. "The bad reputation of these camps was because of the unfortunate choice of names for them; that was a mistake, we should have called them 'educational camps'. There were not only Jewish and political prisoners in the camps, but also criminal elements, who were detained after they served their sentence in prison. Because of this, in 1941, a war year, Germany had the lowest crime rate in decades. The prisoners had to perform heavy



labor, but that was true of the German people, too. The treatment in the camps was severe, but just". I interrupted: "But one cannot deny, that many atrocities occurred in the camps", to which he answered: "I have to admit that this happened, but I then punished the guilty".

Even though during this conversation I constantly had to keep my goal of liberation for Jews and other prisoners in my mind, and therefore had to choose my words carefully, I was not able to, nor did I want to, contain my agitation, when he talked about the "just treatment" in the concentration camps. It was to my satisfaction, in the name of the suffering Jewish people, to tell him a thing or two about the atrocities in the concentration camps. At that moment, I felt that I had the upper hand as the advocate of the bent over, but not destroyed, rights of man. And I believe that Himmler felt the weakness of his position.

I tried once again to get him off the thoughts of trying to defend his position. "Too many things occurred that cannot be changed or rectified any more", I began. "But if in the future we need to build a bridge between our people, then at least the Jews that are still in the areas occupied by Germany, should remain alive. Therefore we are asking that the Jews in the camps near the Swedish and Swiss borders be freed in order to evacuate them to these countries. Additionally we ask that the Jews in the other camps be treated well, be fed properly, that they get the proper medical care, and that the camps be surrendered to the Allies without resistance once the front lines got close. Also, we ask that the requests mentioned in several lists of the Swedish Foreign ministry be fulfilled, and that freedom be given to the prisoners listed by name, be they Swedish, French, Jews, Dutch, and a number of Norwegian hostages".

Kersten vigorously supported all requests. I asked Himmler to tell us the number of Jews still alive in the camps, and he listed the following figures: Theresienstadt 25,000, Rawensbruck 20,000, Mauthausen 20 to 30,000, in addition to smaller numbers in several other camps. Also he claimed that in the camps captured by the Allies, the following number of Jews were left: Auschwitz 150,000, Bergen-Belsen 50,000, Buchenwald 6,000. It seemed to me that his claims were false, and certainly, with respect to Auschwitz, greatly exaggerated.

In Hungary, Himmler claimed to have left 450,000 Jews. "So what were the thanks for this?", he said sanctimoniously. "The Jews shot at our troops in Budapest". I objected: "If there were 450,000 Jews left of the original 850,000, it means that 400,000 Jews were deported to an unknown destiny. The Jews left in Hungary could not know what fate the Germans had in mind for them, and that was the reason for this kind of reaction." Himmler pushed such arguments aside, apparently he appropriated the well-known verse of LaFontaine "This animal is very bad, when attacked, it defends itself" to his own purpose.



Himmler continued on: "It was my intention to turn over the concentration camps without defending them, as I had promised. I turned over Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald, but I got no thanks for this. In Bergen-Belsen they tied up a guard, and photographed him with a few prisoners who had just died. And such pictures are now being published all over the world press. I also turned over Buchenwald without a struggle. Suddenly the advancing American tanks opened fire, hit the hospital building, which consisted of a wooden barrack, and which of course caught on fire, burned down completely, and the burned corpses were later photographed. With these kind of pictures the world press is now printing hate propaganda. When I released 2700 Jews into Switzerland last year, this also resulted in a press campaign against me personally. It was written that I only released these people in order to establish an alibi for myself. I do not need an alibi, as I only did what I thought was necessary for my people, and I will stand on that. I did not become a rich man. Nobody has been covered with dirt in the newspapers in the last 12 years as much as I have been. It never made any difference to me, even in Germany anybody could write about me whatever they wanted. But the publication of atrocities as incitement against myself does not encourage me to continue my policy to turn over the camps without resistance. That is why, a few days ago, when the American tank columns closed in on a camp in Saxony, I had this camp evacuated. Why should I do anything differently?"

I was afraid that Himmler's repeated complaints about the publication of the terrible deeds in the concentration camps, which he tried to label as hate propaganda, would result in a request to stop such publicity as compensation in order to fulfill my requests. Without a doubt Himmler believed, after constantly hearing Goebbels' propaganda, that we Jews really had the power to control the world press, as stated by the Nazi lie propaganda. And maybe he thought that I, as a representative of the Jews could influence the press of the allied and neutral countries, even though he had been told that I had come as a private citizen.

In order to prevent a direct request by him, I interrupted and called to his attention the freedom of the press concept in democratic countries. "Even the government of a democracy is unable to prevent publication of unwanted or embarrassing news. Only deeds count, not what is printed in newspapers. The freeing of 2700 Jews last year was well received in the world press, especially that these prisoners, coming from Theresienstadt, were in relatively good health. I have the impression that Theresienstadt is the best of the camps. A continuation of the policy to release prisoners is the only correct thing, regardless of what the press is writing about it. The freedom of the remaining Jews is of interest not only to the Jewish people, but also to the Swedish government, inasmuch as it had given its blessing to both Dr. Kersten and myself to make this trip. Without a doubt the granting of our requests by you would



make an excellent impression with the people and governments of the Allies. And before the judgment of history, the release of the remaining Jews is of great importance. A continuation of the forced evacuation can only be detrimental for Germany, since the roads are clogged or closed, and the feeding and housing of the people becomes more difficult, etc."

Himmler stressed that Theresienstadt is not a camp per se, but is a town inhabited by only Jews, is completely governed by Jews, and all the necessary labor is performed by Jews. "This is the kind of camp created by myself and my friend Heydrich" he said, "and we hoped to make all the camps this way."

There followed considerable discussions about the various means of rescue suggested by us, and Kersten supported me strongly. We particularly came back several times to the need to permit the evacuation of the camp at Rawensbruck to Sweden.

I did not trust any vague and general promises made by Himmler, however if specific promises were made, they would probably be kept, because Himmler's aides would see to it that his demands would be met. Also I was afraid that the last weeks of the war would be critical to the situation of the people in the camps. The publicity about Buchenwald could possibly let the Nazi bosses, be it Himmler himself or the Hitler-Kaltenbrunner group, to cause the complete disappearance of the remaining concentration camps, in order to completely wipe out any living evidence and witnesses to these atrocities. The last days of the death struggle of the Third Reich could therefore also be the death knell of the few remaining inmates, who came through all the tortures alive.

Himmler wanted to discuss the matter with his adjutant, Dr. Brandt, so I went into the next room together with Schellenberger, for about 20 minutes. During this time, Himmler also dictated two letters to Dr. Kersten. After we returned into the living room, Himmler said:

"I am willing to free 1000 Jewish women from the Rawensbruck concentration camp, and you can pick them up through the Red Cross. The freeing of a number of French women, in accordance with the list of the Swedish Foreign Ministry is also approved. About 50 Norwegian Jews in camps will be freed and brought to the Swedish border. The cases of the 20 Swedish prisoners in Grini, who were convicted by German courts, will be reexamined favorably and, if at all possible, they will be freed. The cases of the liberation of the Norwegian hostages will also be reexamined favorably. A larger number of mostly Dutch prisoners, who were listed by name in Theresienstadt will be freed, as long as the Red Cross can pick them up. The Jewish women in Rawensbruck, however, will be designated as Polish women, rather than Jewish. It is very necessary that not only your visit here must remain secret, but also the arrival of the Jews in Sweden must remain that way. With respect to stopping the forced evacuation and the surrendering of the camps to the Allies, I will endeavor to do my very best."



It was significant, that Himmler was afraid, even at this time, to designate the freed women as Jews. This reflected the difference of opinion between Himmler and Hitler, which Schellenberg explained to me during the morning talk we had. Even though Himmler at that time certainly had the power in his own hands, he did not want to create any friction between himself and Hitler on account of the Jews. Schellenberg had already hinted to me that Hitler's attitudes were completely undermined.

The conversation then touched on other political questions. Himmler began to show his hatred for Bolshevism, and talked in the standard manner of the Nazi propaganda. I am quoting below a few of his words:

"The Americans will agree that we were the last bulwark against Bolshevism."

"Hitler will be remembered in history as a great man, because he gave the world the national-socialist solution, the only one which is able to stand up against Bolshevism." This was the only time during the entire conversation that he mentioned Hitler by name.

"The American and British soldiers will be infected by the spirit of Bolshevism, and will cause severe social problems in their countries."

"The German people are so radicalized that they will ally themselves with the Russians, if National-Socialism falls by the wayside, and that will only strengthen the Russians further."

"There will be starvation in Germany this fall and winter. There will be unforeseen difficulties, and much wisdom will be needed in order to rebuild the world."

"The Americans won their war. The German industrial competition has been destroyed for several decades."

"We are asked to surrender unconditionally. That will never happen. I am not afraid to die."

"During our occupation there was law and order in France, even though I only had 2000 German police there. Everybody had work, and everybody had enough to eat. Only **WE** were successful to clean up the harbor area of Marseilles, institute healthy conditions and establish law and order, something that no French government ever achieved."

"I have sympathy for people that are fighting for their freedom."



"We never lowered ourselves to the methods employed by the British paratroopers, who dropped out of the sky in false uniforms, i.e. German or in civilian clothes, in order to help the Maquis in France."

Himmler learned to understand the idea of the partisan fights a little late! When he made the disdainful remark about the British paratroopers, I was thinking about Holland and especially Rotterdam, but the habit of using lies as a basis of his arguments were typical during the entire conversation.

The talks lasted exactly 2 1/2 hours. It finished at 5 o'clock in the morning, and Himmler left by car. We talked the entire time, except for the 20 minutes that I spent in the adjacent room. For one half hour I was alone with him, a free Jew face to face with the feared and unmerciful chief of the Gestapo, who had 5 million Jews on his conscience.

Himmler spoke calmly most of the time, even when interrupted with some sharp challenges. However, one could sense his inner agitation more and more, in spite of his outward calmness. He talked a lot. Only the most important part of the conversation is contained herein, with my own wording only when there was a need for further clarification. My report is either word for word, or at least shows the meanings of what was said, even though not necessarily in the proper chronological order.

Without a doubt, Himmler was intelligent and well educated, he was very interested in history. But the outward gloss could not hide his real attitudes. His cynicism became very evident when he expounded on the catastrophes which he believed to come. His words to Kersten, when saying good-bye, were typical: "The best part of the German people will be destroyed with us, what happens to the rest of them, is immaterial". In contrast to Hitler, he was a rationalist in his dealings with the Jews. Hitler had a definite idiosyncrasy with respect to the Jews. Himmler never acted in accordance with his feelings. He would order coldblooded killings as long as it fit in with his purposes, and he would change his ways as long as **that** was in agreement with his new purposes.

What reasons would he have had to agree to the small concessions during the last few months of the war and also vis-a-vis ourselves? He did not ask any concessions from us. For sure he did not think that he could buy his own life at this late hour. He was too clever to assume this, he knew very well that his list of sins was too large. Possibly he might have wanted to be judged by history in a better light than the other criminals in Germany.

The shallowness of his arguments was unbelievable. He used nothing but lies in his defense. No logic in building of thoughts, no deep thoughts, which even a criminal might have had, though they might be counter to all what is considered lawful. Only lies and excuses. He only believed that the end justified the means. The fact that he was one of those mostly responsible for the mass murder of Jews, was evident from his own words. I remember distinctly when he was talking about the Jews in Hungary, he said:



"I left 450,000 Jews in Hungary etc.", from which one can deduce, that he was also in part responsible for the destruction of the other, remaining Jews there. Even the number of the Jews left in Hungary was incorrect, and very much exaggerated. During the talks he never said directly that Germany had lost the war, but with everything he said it appeared that he believed it.

After Himmler left us at 5 am, we tried to sleep for a few hours. My inner excitement was abating. Now it was important to get to Berlin and then to Stockholm as quickly as possible, in order to talk to the Foreign ministry and the Red Cross about the evacuation.

We left at 10 o'clock for Berlin. On the way I saw something which really impressed me: The superrace on the highway! One cart after another, loaded with all kinds of household goods, quickly gathered together before fleeing. Between the carts women, children, old people. In this manner moved the train of human misery, from village to village, city to city, in all kinds of weather, away from the front. It could not remain anywhere, after a short stop for food, it had to move on, chased by the nearing front and the fighter planes. The same picture of misery which we saw so often in photographs and in our minds: Frenchmen, Belgians, Poles, Russians, Jews, fleeing before the German soldiers, accompanied by the victorious exultation of the Germans. Now, finally, the Germans were feeling for themselves what they meted out so willingly to other countries and people.

Shortly before we got to Oranienburg, we passed some long marching columns, men in civilian clothing, accompanied by guards. They were prisoners from the Oranienburg concentration camp, on their way north, away from the front. Again forced evacuation because the Soviet troops were getting close. They would rather have congestion on the roads due to these senseless, and for these poor people, dangerous transports, rather than to give away the loot.

The closeness of the front became evident. We heard the thunder of artillery. The streets were full of all kinds of vehicles. Our car was stopped, we should take wounded people with us. However, we continued on our way, and then the streets became less congested. Soon we were in Berlin. Now I had the chance to see this metropolis in daylight. A ghostly view! A field of ruins of unbelievable dimensions. The facades of the houses were half destroyed, the insides were blown to bits. Rarely a house which was inhabitable. Two thirds of the city was destroyed before the battle of Berlin began, and still there were 3 million inhabitants there. How they existed is beyond imagination. During the whole trip I did not see one real store. In front of some of the houses were lines of poorly clothed people waiting to buy food. Traffic was very light, few pedestrians, hardly a trolley. We drove to the Swedish embassy in the west of the city. The elegant area on one side of the Tiergarten was completely razed, only the Victory Column was still standing. What irony of fate!



We tried to reach Count Bernadotte, the chief of the Swedish Red Cross, but did not find him in the embassy. We knew that he was in the vicinity of Berlin, because he was supposed to meet with Himmler shortly after our meeting. We then went to Gestapo headquarters, also located in the west of Berlin. Then we met there with a colleague of Schellenberg, who was in charge of the Swedish transports for the German government. He knew the position of the bus convoy, which had evacuated all Scandinavians and was on the way to Denmark. He would try to reach Count Bernadotte so that the convoy could be diverted to Rawensbruck.

Our task in Berlin was finished. Now to get home, as the siege of Berlin had begun, and Russian artillery was hitting the center of the city. A plane for Copenhagen was supposed to leave at 2 pm, and Kersten and myself had seats reserved on it. However, it was questionable if the plane would be able to leave. The thought of the swarms of Allied planes of the day before did not bring out any comfortable feelings. How could a German airplane escape the lords of the air space. However, it seemed that suddenly the air became "clean", as the Germans called it. We received heavy Mae West type life vests and left at 4 pm in a Kondor airplane, a large troop transport. After barely two hours we landed safely in Copenhagen. It was a wonderful feeling to be again in a city where there were no damaged houses, and people were calm and well dressed. We immediately left for Helsingor (Elsinore), and at 9 o'clock in the evening we were standing on safe Swedish soil. The trip was finished.

Sunday morning in Stockholm, we learned from the Foreign Ministry that they already had received a telegram from the embassy in Berlin. On behalf of Count Bernadotte the message came that the bus convoy was on the way to Rawensbruck. Several days later we found out through Bernadotte, that Himmler, in addition to giving freedom to the one thousand women, decided to free all of the women located in Rawensbruck. This meant that the Swedish Red Cross was able to rescue 7000 women out of the concentration camps within a few days, women of all nationalities, about half of them Jewish. The Jewish prisoners in concentration camps in Norway, numbering approximately 50, were freed and came across the border within a few days. The Foreign Ministry also told us, that the Swedish prisoners held at Grini, near Oslo, as well as several hundred Norwegian hostages were freed out of the camps as a result of our negotiations.

A visit to the rescued Jewish women in the receiving camps in southern Sweden affected and overwhelmed me deeply. It cannot be told what they had suffered during six years of incarceration. First they were herded into a ghetto, then one concentration camp after the other, among them the horrible Auschwitz. During all these years always hungry, always in mortal fear of total annihilation, working very hard, and always tortured. It is a wonder that they were able to survive. Only a few of the hardest could withstand the years of terrible agony. How could they resume something of a normal life? Most of them were alone in the world, their families scattered all over, most likely killed. Their homes and their milieu - most of them were Polish Jewish women - was completely destroyed. Belgians, Dutch, and others, Jews and Non-Jews, were able to



return to their respective homes, but for these Polish Jews there was no return to anything. Everything would only remind them of the years of suffering in the ghettos, in Auschwitz, of their missing families, of their murdered friends, and of their destroyed communities. They were yearning to get back into Jewish surroundings. Palestine is probably their only chance to regain human dignity.

The dramatic encounter that night of two arch enemies, the infamous chief of the Gestapo and a representative of the tortured Jewish people caused the beginning of freedom for a few leftover victims of the Nazi extermination. A Jewish intervention on behalf of the remainder of people who were threatened with destruction, was only possible because of circumstances that all pointed in the same direction, namely the end and loss of the war. Dr. Kersten's part in arranging the negotiations, and also the part he played during the talks, has already been mentioned previously. The real results of the negotiations and the actual rescue of the prisoners was now possible and indeed began through the efforts of the Swedish Red Cross, which certainly lived up to its highest ideals. The rescue attempt was made possible also through the initiative and active support of the Foreign Ministry. No conditions or limitations were imposed by the Foreign Ministry with respect to the number and nationalities of those to be rescued. All of them were welcomed into Sweden as guests of our government, and because of this, they were able to live a life of freedom in the future.